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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

God of all nations, strengthen us that we may meet the challenges of these times. Enable us to live so that we will bring honor to Your Name. Be merciful to our Nation, for You are our hope.

Today, empower our lawmakers with the music of Your wisdom that they may bring hope out of despair and joy out of sadness. Lord, teach them to celebrate even in the darkness, because You are the God of our salvation. We celebrate Your mighty acts and take solace from Your providential guidance.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The Democratic leader is recognized.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I come to the floor today not to talk about a political issue, in the real sense of the word—not Democrat versus Republican—but a very difficult sensitive issue. It is hard to talk about, but we as a nation can't keep ignoring this important topic.

It has been more than 20 years since I learned about something called fe-

male genital mutilation, known as FGM. Since then, I have spoken often against this awful procedure and the devastating effect it has on women and girls around the world.

A number of people warned me 20 years ago that this isn't a subject I should talk about. It was taboo. They thought it would be untoward for me to do so. But I told them I had to because no one else was talking about it. So I am going to continue doing everything I can to bring attention to this issue and fight to end this horrible, awful, brutal practice perpetrated against women and girls.

It was a 1994 cable news program that introduced me to this practice. One of my friends in Las Vegas said: You can't imagine this. This was a young woman who sent this to me. I didn't expect getting this from her or anyone else. But we were friends, and so I watched this. She said: You have to. And I did: A 10-year-old little girl in a party dress held down by two men, her legs spread apart, and she was brutally mutilated as her genitals were cut away. These images have continually haunted me over the years. I will never ever forget the picture that I saw.

There are different forms of female genital mutilation around the world. The most severe and atrocious is the one in which the girl's genitals are cut away. But then the little girls are literally sewn shut, leaving only a small opening for urine and menstrual blood.

Though FGM is performed for different reasons around the world. One thing is very clear: Whatever rationality you try to give to this practice, it is a form of control and oppression of women and girls.

In addition to the psychological impact, this form of gender-based violence has serious medical risks, including death, of course. It is recognized by the United Nations as a human rights violation, as it should be.

But FGM is still happening. As we speak, 200 million women and girls

worldwide have undergone FGM—200 million women and girls who are alive today who have undergone that procedure that I watched on cable news, or something like it. More than two decades after I first saw that program, women and girls are still being hacked, mutilated. It is not done in a hospital, an operating room. It is done in very unsanitary conditions most of the time.

This practice remains prevalent in at least 30 countries. In some places, the rates of FGM are higher than 90 percent—90 percent. In many of these countries, girls are cut before the age of 5. In most places they are cut between the ages of 5 and 14. In many of these countries, girls—well, enough. Imagine that—girls who haven't even started school yet, of kindergarten age or younger, being subjected to this horror.

Because of these millions of girls, I have spent more than 20 years trying to do something about it. I have worked hard to pass legislation outlawing the practice in the United States and banning so-called vacation cutting, which goes on when young girls are shipped overseas. Because it is illegal here, due to the laws we passed, they take them overseas to be cut.

There was some bipartisan support, obviously, for this. It is not a partisan issue. We were able to have a few victories—certainly not enough, but some. Still, this brutal practice continues around the world, and it is clear there must be much more done—much more done.

That is why, at my request, the General Accountability Office began a study on the American Government's efforts to stop this practice. The GAO has now completed its report about our government's international efforts. It wasn't much of a report. It was kind of short. The report is shameful in terms of what we have not done.

The title of the report says it all: "Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting:

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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